

**Corps' Values: A Matter of Principle, Morals, and Ethical  
Decision Making**

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## **Corps' Values: A Matter of Principle, Morals, and Ethical Decision Making**

### **Introduction**

Several ideas have emerged commenting on the long war and how to be successful at fighting it. Within the long war, a significant amount of decisionmaking has been delegated to small unit leaders. Contrary to other conflicts, the long war has been characterized by strategic impacts held at the small unit leader level. Enhanced Company Operations (ECO) offers a good example on how decisions at the tactical level can potentially have strategic impacts. Unfortunately, the current pre-deployment training program (PTP) focuses on teaching the most recent tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP's) to Marines. Based on the complexity of decisions that small unit leaders are being expected to make in the current operating environment, training in ethical decisionmaking is necessary. The current PTP is insufficient and the Marine Corps needs to improve training in ethical decisionmaking.

### **Background**

Values based training in the Marine Corps today has been established to provide Marine's with a set of values and principles that is meant to guide the conduct of Marines. Many

potential Marines who enter the Marine Corps come from different walks of life, bringing with them a variety of principles and values. In order to introduce the institutional values to the newly aspiring Marines, the Marine Corps establishes training during the initial phases of a Marine's career. Values based training occurs at boot camp, the school of infantry (SOI), the basic school (TBS), and other similar institutions.

To prepare Marines to address the complex ethical issues with which they are confronted in the long war, the Marine Corps must improve training in ethical decisionmaking as part of the PTP. The current conflict requires Marines to consider the implications of their decision on the battlefield and the moral impact on the populace within the countries they fight. Winning the long war will require Marines to evaluate missions for winning from a moral and ethical standpoint as demonstrated by the following table.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lind, William S., Advanced Warfighting Seminars at EWS, MCCDC, Virginia, 18 September 2008.

## Mission Evaluator

	Tactical	Operational	Strategic
Physical			
Mental			
Moral			

Winning in Iraq and Afghanistan will require sound moral decisions to be made by all Marines. The long war dictates that the Marine Corps must prevent doubts about the legitimacy and morality of the current conflict by embracing ethical decision-making. As General Mattis stated:

commanders and troops need an ethical framework that will help them make quick, correct, and morally defensible decisions; ...maintaining an ethical balance and the moral high ground has a direct and positive operational impact, making an ethically sound approach to decisionmaking an action that breeds combat power.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mattis, LtGen James N., Comments made during the first annual MCA-MCCDC dinner at the Clubs of Quantico on 22 August 2008; Marine Corps Association: Programs and Events. 23 August 2008, Marine Corps Association, accessed 01 December 2008, available from <http://www.mca-marines.org/programsMCCDC.asp>, pg 3.

During the 2008 Russell Leadership Conference General Conway articulated: "Non-Commissioned Officer's (NCO's) will win this war".<sup>3</sup> Surveys at the conference indicate that only fifty-eight percent of NCO's felt strongly about their understanding and ability to instruct core values. Eighty-one percent felt prepared to evaluate other Marines on core values and on life's principles. While only forty-eight percent of the NCO's present believed that their subordinates understood and embraced the core values.<sup>4</sup> These percentages indicate the need to pursue a more direct approach on improving the moral and ethical training Marines currently have.

Former Commandant, Charles Krulak, once stated:

The Marine Corps does two things for America: makes Marines and wins our nation's battles. Accomplishing the latter depends upon how well the former is done. Marines are made through a process called transformation. During this process, the lives of young men and women are changed forever by imbuing them with the nation's highest ideals.<sup>5</sup>

Marine Corps basic training adequately teaches the core values, leadership principles and traits; however, this training only

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<sup>3</sup> Parkyn, LtCol Michael, "Some Lessons Learned: The 2008 Russell Leadership Conference", Marine Corps Gazette, November, 2008, pg. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Marine Corps Reference Publication 6-11D, Sustaining the Transformation, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., 1999, Forward by General Charles C. Krulak.

meets the basic requirements that need to be expanded upon in order to continue the transformation. Providing Marines with the proper tools to make the ethical decisions required in the long war necessitates continued training after departing from basic training.

Improving how Marines make ethical decisions on the battlefield can directly contribute to winning the long war. "We should never ask our men to do anything for which they are not prepared to do."<sup>6</sup> "Today's military circles, promote the idea of a strategic corporal with a general belief that future operations will be continue to be complex and will require an increased involvement of junior leadership."<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, decisions made by junior leaders can have serious moral implications.<sup>8</sup> The decisions made during the Abu Ghraib incident have fully demonstrated the enormous strategic consequences that a junior leader can have. Colonel Frederick Padilla believes that the Abu Ghraib incident degraded progress and extended the conflict by at least two years.<sup>9</sup> "Extending the

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<sup>6</sup> Holton, PH.D. Bil, "Leadership Lessons of Robert E. Lee" Gramercy Books, an imprint of Random House Value Publishing Inc., New York, 1999, pg. 129.

<sup>7</sup> Major Lydia Liddy, "The Strategic Corporal: some requirements in training and education", Australian Army Journal vol. II, no. 2, pg. 139 [journal online]; available from <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/liddy.pdf>; internet, accessed 27 December 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Lind, William S., Advanced Warfighting Seminars at EWS, MCCDC, Virginia, 18 September 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Colonel Padilla, Frederick, Chief of Staff of MCCDC, office call by author on 06 January 2009.

fight in the insurgency has led to a higher cost in resources and lives."<sup>10</sup>

Surprisingly, there is not enough training in ethical decisionmaking that fully prepares Marines for what they may face on the battlefield.<sup>11</sup> Training in ethical decisionmaking needs to improve by more effectively integrating the small unit leader as a solution to the long war.

If Marine leaders realize the importance of the decisions that junior leaders have to make on the battlefield, then why does the Marine Corps not provide additional training to address the issue? In May 2007, General Conway stated: "In the current fight, the greatest concern is the moral piece. Every little mistake aids the enemy, hurts Marines psychologically, and breaks the bond with the American people."<sup>12</sup> The Commandant's concern should not be taken lightly. The moral piece is important to consider because negative implications have proven to go beyond the tactical and operational level.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lt Col Bohm, Jason M., conversation with author in Geiger Hall on 15 January 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Author, Comments made based on the author's experience during pre-deployment training to Afghanistan in 2004 and pre-deployment training to Iraq in 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, Dr. Joseph J., "Tools for the Marine Leader", Lejeune Leadership Institute, Virginia, 2008, pg.3.

<sup>13</sup> Lind, William S., Advanced Warfighting Seminars at EWS, MCCDC, Virginia, 18 September 2008.



Today, it is not difficult to see, the United States can be viewed as abusing its power against a lightly armed force.<sup>14</sup> The implications of such views extend to the local populace and the international community. Close scrutiny by the local populace and the international community's require training improvements in current programs and ethical decisionmaking in the Marine Corps.

### **Current Programs**

The Marine Corps War-fighting Laboratory developed a program called Combat Squad Leader on decision-making.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the Combat Squad Leader program only addresses the latest TTP's and lessons learned from fighting in the urban terrain. Another prominent development is the Marine Corps Mentorship Program (MCMP), which among other topics, addresses core values along with leadership traits and principles. But the MCMP does not address training in ethical decision-making. The Lejeune Leadership Institute is an entity that focuses on the specifics of the Corps' ethical decision-making. Through this institution, the Marine Corps can advance its ability to provide training in ethical decisionmaking.

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<sup>14</sup> Lind, William S., Advanced Warfighting Seminars at EWS, MCCDC, Virginia, 18 September 2008.

<sup>15</sup> X-File 3-11.21 (Revised), "Combat Squad Leader: Decision Making", Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, site visited 04 December 2008, available at: <https://www.mcwl.quantico.usmc.mil/docs/SqdLdrXFileRevised.pdf>

An issue with the current Marine Corps training on ethical decision making is that it focuses exclusively on officers and staff non-commissioned officers (SNCO) and not on the junior leadership. This focus neglects training where training is needed most; it does however, establish the foundation for SNCO's and officers to provide training for junior leaders. Having the secondary focus on developing subordinate leadership at the NCO level can also pose a problem when it comes to implementation across the Marine Corps. Another problem arises during the deployment cycle and permanent changes of station, some junior leaders may not receive the training. To implement training on ethical decisionmaking requires the focus must be on the seasoned leadership before the junior leadership.

### **Beyond the Initial Transformation**

Training in ethical decisionmaking within the Marine Corps needs to focus on guiding the individual to internalize core values. All Marines have memorized the words: Honor, Courage, and Commitment; however, it seems that few know how to define the three words.<sup>16</sup> Knowing how to define the words is irrelevant, it is far better to live and exemplify the meaning of honor, courage, and commitment. When an individual lives by

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<sup>16</sup> Parkyn, LtCol Michael, "Some Lessons Learned: The 2008 Russel Leadership Conference", Marine Corps Gazette, November, 2008, pg. 64.

example, he or she demonstrates a complete understanding of the core values. Some Marines carry their Marine Corps core values card and at times that is all it is: a card in their wallet. If the Marine Corps is to continue fostering the growth of future leaders in character and principle, it will need to go beyond a wallet card; the Marine Corps must guide Marines through a process of internalizing the core values.

Training in ethical decisionmaking should be through a practical approach that encompasses small group guided discussions and addresses criteria for self-assessment. The implementation of instruction in ethical decision-making, within the Marine Corps, needs to be a continuation of the values and principles Marines have learned in basic training. As a staff sergeant in the first Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) said, "Recruit training only introduces the standard; schools beyond that may or may not even touch on doing the *right* thing."<sup>17</sup> Continuing the transformation process and enhancing the Corps' ability to develop leaders of character and principle will require the effort and consistency of the force as a whole.

Development of leaders within the Corps needs to be done through the systematic process of teaching one principle/value at a time. The following recommendation for leadership training

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas, Dr. Joseph J., "Tools for the Marine Leader", Lejeune Leadership Institute, Virginia, 2008, pg.3.

draws upon the training that the "La Red International" Business Network uses.<sup>18</sup> A starting point is at the unit level. Groups of ten to thirteen Marines need to be established. The small groups will allow for focused participation by individuals. Each principle/value should be covered and addressed each week, starting with a short story in which the principle/value is exemplified. The short story should be followed by questions that demonstrate the understanding of the principle/value. The questions would then be answered by the individuals within the group; time should allow for participation and discussion to take place within the group to further cultivate understanding of the principle/value by the group as a whole.

After all the questions have been discussed, self-assessment should be conducted via scale measurement (of one to ten) to indicate how well one fulfills the principle/value. Follow-on questions should address how an individual can improve the rating one has assigned to him or herself. Finally, prior to addressing a new principle/value, all individuals should have an opportunity to share any progress that the individual may have had throughout the prior week. Sharing progress will establish an accountability system internal to each group, which

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<sup>18</sup> Authors, Comments are based on the author's personal experience as the first USMC Personnel Exchange Program (PEP) Officer with the Colombian Marine Corps from July 2006 - July 2008. For more information on "La Red International Business Network" visit: <http://lared.org>.

in turn, will promote the individual to incorporate the principle/value into one's way of life.

This leadership training should be conducted through a building-block approach. The first requirement will be a detailed analysis of each principles/values that will be presented. The analysis should also include a structured outline for the training that will take place shortly after the Marine graduates from basic training. Providing continuity in the training after a Marine leaves basic training will help integrate each principle/value. Successful integration of each principle/value will produce specific qualities within the character of an individual that will benefit the Marine Corps. Consistency in the training throughout a Marine's career will have cultivated a well-rounded individual of character and principle with the required foundation for follow-on training in decisionmaking. Follow-on training needs to be scenario based with a focus on ethical decisionmaking and cultural awareness to prepare for deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan.

### **The Need for Continued Training**

Some may argue that the Marine Corps has done well with the current form of core values instruction and no change is needed. If that is the case, then why has General Conway (and generals in the past) identified the need to develop the moral

disciplines of Marines?<sup>19</sup> Marines need a solid foundation on which to project their character and personality within the Marine Corps. The solid foundation needs to be the institutional values that have already been established by the Marine Corps. What must be improved is the Marine Corps' ability to internalize those values into every Marine throughout the Corps.

Others may argue that what is needed in the long war is better equipment, TTP's, and cultural knowledge of the enemy and not more core values. True, there is a need for better equipment and knowledge, but the equipment and knowledge will only be as good as the warfighter. What one must consider is that during Operation Desert Storm, Marines had the equipment and some knowledge the culture, but no prolonged occupation of Iraq occurred. For the most part, the international community believed that armed intervention by the U.S. was required and the dynamics were different in that conflict. Contrary to the long war, the moral implications of decisions made during Desert Storm at the junior leader level did not have strategic implications. The long war dictates that the Marine Corps' junior leadership be prepared to make the best decisions possible.

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<sup>19</sup> Wood, Capt Lucas M., "Marine Corps Professional Reading Program (Rein)", Marine Corps Gazette, November, 2008, pg. 73.

It is wrong to believe that the initial core values training received during boot camp will carry a Marine throughout his career. There needs to be continuity in core values training with an emphasis on decisionmaking; bad decisions will prolong the war. Making the war longer will cost lives and other precious resources. The Marine Corps' implementation and training of core values must be improved.

Many, but not all, Marines may have internalized the Marine Corps core values. Character and principle have a very significant role within an individual: it gives the individual moral courage. Moral courage must be developed and nurtured within the Marine Corps as it applies to ethical decisionmaking if it is to play a significant role in winning the long war. Moral courage may not be the norm with all Marines within the Marine Corps; if it was, there would probably be fewer motorcycle and liberty incidents.<sup>20</sup> What ends up happening when an individual does demonstrate moral courage is that he or she become victims or are made out to be troublemakers.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ruggiero, Vincent R., "Thinking Critically about Ethical Issues", McGraw-Hill Higher Education, New York, 2004, pg. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Adelhelm, Robert, "HONOR, COURAGE, COMMITMENT...Is the change really for life...when it comes to the Core Values", dated 18 April 2006, available at <http://www.leatherneck.com/ezone/articles/32/1/HONOR,-COURAGE,-COMMITMENT%85Is-the-change-really-for-life%85when-it-comes-to-the-core-values>.

## Conclusion

The current conflict is complex. It requires every decision made on the battlefield to contribute towards winning the long war. The long war dictates that the Marine Corps partake in decentralized decisionmaking and execution, possibly through ECO. Neither America nor the Marine Corps can afford to have decisions made which result in negative impacts in the long war efforts. The effort and resources invested in developing junior leaders of principle and character can greatly benefit today's Marine Corps. Establishing training in ethical decisionmaking will greatly benefit the Marine Corps in winning the long war today and impact the Corps' future generations. Winston Churchill well advised: "It is not enough for us to do our best; sometimes we have to do what's required".<sup>22</sup> Training in ethical decisionmaking is a requirement that must be included in PTP and on a continual basis throughout the Marine Corps.

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<sup>22</sup> Maxwell, John C., "Developing the Leader Within You", Thomas Nelson, Inc., Tennessee, 1993, pg. 171.



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